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CLASSROOM CURRICULUM:
A CASE STUDY OF TEACHER CHOICE

Rebecca Killen Hawthorne

Paper to be presented at the AERA Annual Meeting
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ABSTRACT

Contemporary controversy about the proper mix of autonomy and obligation in teaching reveals contention concerning the role of teachers as professionals. At the classroom level, this controversy revolves around individual teachers' translation of prescribed curricular policy into the operational curriculum of the classroom. An exploratory case study of one classroom teacher's curricular choices suggests that professional factors, predominantly personal values and experience, have a pervasive influence on classroom curriculum. Assuming the role of autonomous agent, the teacher addresses client obligations through selection of curricular content, texts/materials, presentation, activities, and evaluation. The classroom teacher's interaction with the organizational environment of the school and district within which she works expands or limits the boundaries of professional autonomy over the classroom curriculum, reflecting the delicate balance between autonomy and obligation at the classroom level.

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My direct responsibility in terms of curriculum... Supposedly in terms of organizational chart I have direct responsibility to the instructional supervisor, and through her to the principal, and through the principal to the school board, and through the school board to the parents, and then we get around to the students. In reality, I find emotionally and intellectually I aim my dedication to the students, through the parents, through the school board, to my principal, and back to my instructional supervisor. Education needs to have all resources directed to the students... You talk about curriculum and lesson plans and you don't talk about the soul of the student, I just... it's like the conveyor belt approach to curriculum. You shovel it all in and the kid regurgitates it out and so on and so forth. Somehow it misses education totally. The curriculum is the key to making that human being grow. You have a human being... that's the key.

These words from a classroom teacher underscore contemporary controversy about the proper mix of autonomy and obligation in teaching. One approach to this controversy argues that fidelity to prescribed policy represents the truest form of professionalism. Another approach maintains that teachers' first and foremost obligation as professionals is to the students they teach.

At the classroom level, controversy between autonomy and obligation revolves around the individual teacher's translation of prescribed curricular policy into the operational curriculum of the classroom. Curriculum policy, whether in the form of formal guidelines, topical lists, or mandated textbooks, presents the classroom teacher with materials holding inherent "curriculum potential" (Ben-Peretz, 1975). The teacher exploits this potential by selecting specific concepts, materials, presentation, learning activities, and evaluation. Her selections along these five dimensions constitute an individual interpretation of curricular policy.

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A number of constraints (obligations) mediate the process of translation from potential to operational curriculum and shape the ultimate realization of curriculum policy. The classroom teacher functions as a professional within a hierarchical organization, a complex role which generates multiple obligations upon her classroom instructional program (Scott, 1966, p. 266; Shulman, 1983, p. 497). Possessing a wide repertoire of professional skills and specialized knowledge, the teacher acts independently of colleagues and in accordance with internalized norms and standards of the teaching profession (Scott, 1966, p. 267).

Individual autonomy and professional discretion, however, are constrained by organizational decisions made outside of the classroom. Organizational directives in the form of district and school policy, administrative supervision, and formal rules and standards influence the classroom teacher's curricular choices both directly and indirectly by structuring the school day, assigning students to particular classes, and specifying textbooks among other things (Shulman, 1983, p. 492). Thus the classroom teacher juggles two sets of obligations, one to the profession of which she is a member and one to the organization within which she practices as a professional.

A third set of obligations arises out of the interactive nature of the student/teacher relationship itself. Teachers' instructional actions are predicated on student needs and responses (Shulman, 1983, p. 488). The student/teacher relationship mirrors the essential elements of the client/professional relationship in which the professional places himself under an obligation to serve clients to the best of his ability according to client needs. In light of such an obligation, student characteristics such as ability, behavior, and special needs influence the instructional

program delivered by the professional to the client within the classroom setting. Client considerations extend beyond students to parents who, as proxies, represent student interests. Their lobbying, whether through organizational channels or one-on-one with the classroom teacher, further influences the weight of client obligations upon the classroom teacher's instructional program.

Multiple obligations to profession, organization, and client which the classroom teacher faces provide the key to teacher choice. "Role complexity, far from being a debilitating source of decisional paralysis, constitutes instead the seedbed of autonomy" (Shulman, 1983, p. 499). Faced with multiple, competing and at times conflicting influences upon his instructional program, the classroom teacher responds to some at one time and to others in alternative circumstances consciously or, at times, unconsciously. In such a manner the teacher translates curriculum potential into operational classroom curriculum and integrates obligations to profession, organization, and client into classroom practice.

Shaping classroom practice -- deciding what to teach and how to teach it, is the stuff of the teaching profession. The professional autonomy associated with such choices characterizes the conception of teachers as professionals. But teachers are unusual professionals for they work within hierarchical, public organizations that place highly visible constraints upon their professional discretion. In order to understand the limits and possibilities of professional autonomy in classroom teaching, indepth analyses of the sources of influence on teacher curricular choices and the subsequent decisions made by experienced teachers are necessary. My purpose in the reported research was to investigate the constellation of influences shaping the curricular

decision-making process of one classroom teacher to suggest sources of professional autonomy and obligation in classroom curriculum.

Curriculum Defined

Curriculum has been conceptualized in various ways: ideal, formal, perceived, operational, and experiential (Goodlad, 1979). Classroom curricular practice, individual teachers' interpretations of curricular policy as presented to their students, corresponds to the operational curriculum. In constructing this curriculum, teachers make choices along five curricular dimensions:

1. content -- what to teach?
2. texts and materials -- what sources to use?
3. modes of presentation -- how to present content?
4. learning activities -- how to involve students with content?
5. methods of evaluation -- how to evaluate student learning?

Choices pertaining to these five dimensions collectively form the operational classroom curriculum. Behind each choice lies a configuration of influential factors emanating from such sources as district mandates, professional skill, or organizational norms. In this report, I describe these factors and the relative influence each has on the curricular choices of one classroom teacher.

Empirical research has not directly examined factors influencing teacher curricular choice. Research on teacher decision-making investigates curricular decision-making but focuses on the decision-making process without exploring the factors influencing that process. We are left without a contextual understanding of classroom curricular choice.

Most of the research relevant to the topic of teacher curricular choice focuses on isolated sources of influence on classroom teaching such as teacher knowledge (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, in press; Elbaz, 1983; Amarel and Chittenden, 1982), teacher values and experience (Cuban, 1984; Janesick, 1978; Lightfoot, 1973; Lortie, 1975), collegial exchange (Little, 1982), student characteristics (Dreeben and Barr, 1983; Shavelson and Stern, 1981), parental contact (Lightfoot, 1978; Sowers, 1980), and organizational norms and directives (Meyer, Scott, Cole, and Intili, 1978; Weick, 1982; Rowan, Bossert, and Dwyer, 1983). This one-dimensional focus ignores the complex reality of multiple and competing obligations upon classroom teachers' instructional programs. It provides no sense of perspective. The significance of a factor in a complex whole must be understood against the array in which it participates. To what extent does teacher knowledge influence curricular choice? How does the relative strength of this factor compare with personal values or collegial exchange? To understand the influence of one factor, we must grasp its relationship with competitors.

By limiting our focus to one source of influence, the research literature loses sight of the image of teachers as active agents constructing classroom curriculum in response to professional, organizational, and client obligations which converge in the classroom setting. We lack a sense of the personal, interpretive nature of the teacher's active translation of curriculum policy to operational curriculum.

Acknowledgment of multiple sources of influence and of teacher choice as a personal, interpretive process points to the inherent complexity of such inquiry. Complexity deepens as we recognize the interrelationships

of the factors in question. State/district/school policy affects the configuration of student characteristics in classrooms as well as organizational norms. Professional norms influence curricular choices directly and indirectly through professional skill and knowledge, collegial exchange, and personal values and experience. Student characteristics, in the process of influencing teacher curricular choices, cycle into professional knowledge and skill which interact simultaneously with collegial exchange. A complex web of influence entangles classroom teachers' curricular choices. The point of disentanglement must be the classroom teacher herself.

THE STUDY

To begin to identify and understand the constellation of factors influencing classroom curricular choice, the relative strength of their influence, and the degree to which their influence is subject-specific, I turn to an exploratory case study of one classroom teacher's curricular choices. Through a two phase process of data collection, I documented the teacher's curricular choices along all five dimensions of the operational classroom curriculum -- content, texts/materials, presentation, activities, and evaluation by passively participating in the teacher's school day for a two week period. Daily interviewing, classroom observation, and document collection and analysis revolved around classroom practice. In a second phase of data collection, I employed retrospective interviews and stimulated recall based upon the data collected in phase one to identify and determine the relative influence of the various factors affecting teacher choice. Sources of triangulation for self-report data included interviews of secondary informants

(colleagues, instructional supervisors, principal, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction), extensive observation, and document collection and analysis at all levels of the educational organization. From the following analysis, I begin to draw hypotheses regarding the balance of professional autonomy and obligation over the classroom curriculum.

THE PLACE AND THE PERSON

Talbot Middle School, surrounded by tall pines, pruned shrubs, and clipped lawns, resides at the corner of two residential streets in what the school principal describes as a "WASP community -- pure YUPPIE." Families, whether single-parented (35%) or double-parented, are successful and highly educated in this upper middle class enclave. The majority of parents hold college or advanced degrees. Their focus on the critical importance of education for their children carries distinct implications for the faculty and administrative staff at Talbot and the companion schools in the district. Drawing upon this focus and support, the school district has maintained for many years a remarkable reputation as a "lighthouse district," an image which is tarnishing as budget cuts, school closings, and faculty retirements escalate.

Deborah Rosen teaches seventh grade social studies and English at Talbot. She counts seventeen years in the district, only three of which have been spent at Talbot. One of the youngsters on the faculty, Deborah holds a B.A. and M.A. in history (with a minor in anthropology) and an M.A. in educational administration, not unusual credentials in a district where "even kindergarten teachers are expected to have a Ph.D. thesis on the way" to quote Talbot's principal. Deborah began her teaching career

at Washington Middle School, Talbot's cross-town rival. She requested a transfer to Talbot after her maternity leave upon the invitation of Talbot's principal. "Talbot is a school with a great tradition," Deborah explains. "It's located in the wealthier half of town. The school has an excellent staff, neat parents, and wonderful students!" The move agrees with her; but then, Deborah asserts, "I'm a team player!"

Currently, Deborah teaches a part-time schedule, although she plans a return to full-time next year. "I went part-time to be with my daughter and have lunch with her and take her and her little friends to the park. I haven't been able to do that." This year's scheduling resulted in Deborah's assignment to two morning classes and one afternoon class, a "lousy schedule" which is "against district policy for part-time teachers... You are only supposed to be teaching morning or afternoon." After swapping an English class for a social studies class with a colleague who majored in English, Deborah chose not to push for a new schedule. "I could have had my classes changed, but it would have meant more dislocation in the department." Talbot's upcoming merger with Washington this spring provides enough upheaval in Deborah's daily existence and that of her colleagues.

The school district provides Deborah with the curriculum for the school year, and she feels a "legal contractual responsibility" to follow it. Social studies for grade seven comes fully packaged from the district office complete with student reading packets and a detailed teacher's manual listing concepts, materials, modes of presentation, learning activities, and evaluation measures. Developed over ten years ago by district teachers given release time for the express purpose of curriculum development, the seventh grade social studies program introduces students

to key anthropological, political, economic, and social concepts. Students work with these concepts through a series of application units. They explore the meaning of political system in the context of the ancient Hebrews and analyze the economic needs and wants of the primitive Bushmen in contrast with their own. Classical Greece provides a model of a more advanced political and economic system with the accoutrements of trade, barter, and money. A final unit on ancient Egyptian society illustrates cultural, political, and economic concepts and instructs students in the archeological and anthropological methods employed in "unlocking the past."

Deborah likes to involve her students in "stepping back into history." She points to the importance of inference making throughout the social studies curriculum and the central focus on the question WHY? "This curriculum is the best stuff I've ever seen!" Deborah maintains. Tight, organized, and "crammed" with material, it provides a strong framework for Deborah's classroom curriculum. Her choices of what to teach, how to teach it, and how to evaluate her students' learning revolve around the district social studies program.

The seventh grade English curriculum lacks a cohesive structure. In Deborah's words, "English is like a wide open landscape. There's no direction. It's like here's the public library... take out whatever you want!" In striking contrast to social studies, no units or materials or specific guidelines exist. The single page English framework lists specific topics under the general headings of Spelling/Vocabulary, Composition, Sentence Structure, Mechanics, Reading and Literature, and Speaking and Listening.

The English framework lists every bloody idea... essentially it's the table of contents from Warriner's. That doesn't make any sense. In composition and literature it makes more sense to teach specific units like in social studies. In social studies the units have a sequence. There is no sequence in English...

(7th grade English teacher)

With only a list of concepts and no materials or suggestions for presentation or learning activities or evaluation, Deborah finds herself struggling to develop a classroom curriculum in English. It is a time-consuming and frustrating experience.

To ask a classroom teacher to write curriculum while teaching is like asking someone to write, produce, sell tickets, usher, and act in a play all at once!

THE PERSONAL DIMENSION OF PROFESSIONALISM

My personal beliefs underlie everything I do in curriculum.

Deborah's personal values and experiences shape her curricular choices. Her strong beliefs about teaching structure her classroom and guide her process of curriculum construction. For Deborah, the construction process is an organized one as she considers organization a virtue. Organization entails developing a vision of where one wants to go, planning ahead how to get there, and gathering the appropriate materials. Deborah's visions of seventh grade social studies and English "spin off" from district frameworks and take on her personal emphasis.

You bring the values that shape your life, that have shaped you... you bring your values into the classroom. And if somebody is not big on human relations, there's going to be no mention of Martin Luther King. Look at what I do with economics! Half of the entire unit is totally my stuff, and it's totally looking at the economic problem... looking at relationships between people. Today we were talking about crime. My honors class next week will become

U.S. Senators solving the economic problem, making laws and looking at environmental concerns... pollution of land, water, air, overpopulation... No one else in the department does that. No one else shows the same films or has the same approach. The other seventh grade teachers look at it more... like Louise will spend more time on exchange, money exchange. She'll go into serfdom and feudalism and capitalism. She'll leave out the human relations... how did the serfs FEEL? She won't mention feelings at all. That's fine. Kids need to have all types of exposure... to all types of different value systems. What teachers emphasize is directly related to values and personal experience.

The individuality of Deborah's vision reflects the personal dimension of curricular choice. This dimension suffuses her organization of daily lessons and preparation of materials as Deborah engages in a personal cycle of curricular construction and revision. Curricular decision-making occurs before, during, and after class. Deborah's terse notes in her lesson plan book with their numbered order reflect the value she places on organization. Yet she'll change those curricular choices mid-stream on occasion.

Today I got an inspiration with my honors kids... to have them play Athenian or Spartan parents. They listened to this marvelous tape of an Athenian child being raised in his society and a Spartan child being raised in his. We had the kids break down as parents... half the class were Spartan parents and half were Athenian. They had a list of values and had to decide on the ten best. Then we looked at the commonalities of the two societies with respect to Spartan ideals and Athenian ideals. The aim was to create conflict resolution by emphasizing the commonalities, not the differences. This all came to me in the midst of everything today... my brain just... all of the sudden it happened. It was not the lesson plan. I had a whole thing lined up on stringy sentence writing for English. That was bagged, and we just kept going. The kids got really jazzed up!

After seventeen years of teaching, she still devotes five hours a weekend to selecting and preparing course materials in her classroom. Deborah

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even grades student papers in an organized fashion. "I try to limit myself to two hours per night, but it doesn't always work!" Assignment sheets for student homework, procedural instructions for research reports, and detailed lists of extra credit options impress upon Deborah's students the importance of organization. Deborah has even, on occasion, shared her organization by typing up and distributing an outline of the day's lesson and subsequent assignments to the class!

Deborah balances organization with her belief in the value of flexibility.

Teaching is instinctive. I think of time on task... it's important to know when to go off task, when to nurture, laugh, and throw the lesson plans out the window. You have to be structured but flexible. I adapt to the movement, the mood, and national affairs.

She follows up inspirations ("especially in English") and takes cues from her audience. She becomes an actress as she presents curricular concepts to her students.

Being an actress or an actor is an element of teaching. It's important to be structured, organized and flexible... to take cues from your audience. You have to be able to change, pick up the vibes and the feelings of the kids. You don't just open their mouths and pour curriculum down. You have to know when to modify, when to crack a joke, when to talk about what's on the kids' minds and souls.

Deborah infuses her presentation with emotion and physical movement in an effort to "really plug" students in and involve them. Students not only read about the concepts of value, wealth, needs and wants, and scarcity; but they engage in a frenzied trading game to discover for themselves the meanings of the terms and the emotional connotations accompanying them.

People learn when they are emotionally involved. Not just the brain cells, but emotions are a big part of learning. And when people can see that their personal

lives are involved in saving goods and wealth or that they have invested in stock, then they start plugging into the concepts... it becomes important to them, and it seems a part of their life.

- Her concern with affect leads Deborah to design materials and activities which incorporate "both the right and left side of the brain." Many assignments require illustrations. Research papers entail "becoming a person from history" as students combine analytic work with creativity in an imaginative presentation of history. Book reports assume an oral form with students dressing up as characters and presenting their characters' perspectives on the events in which they were involved.

I think the more you reach a kid visually, auditorily, and kinesthetically in terms of learning, the transition as well as honors, the better the child learns...

Deborah places the highest value on student learning. A continual focus on key concepts in curricular materials, presentation, activities, and evaluation communicates Deborah's desire for student mastery. She pulls these concepts from the district framework. By herself or with the help of colleagues, she develops worksheets, locates films, and creates learning activities which reinforce or require application of curricular concepts.

WORKSHEET: 'MRS. PEABODY'S BEACH'

1. Identify the elements of land, labor, and capital (the three factors of production) that you observe in the film.
2. Is Mrs. Peabody producing a good or a service? Explain.
3. What was Mrs. Peabody's most valuable resource -- natural, human, or capital? Explain your answer. (Honors)
4. Mrs. Peabody is an entrepreneur. Explain that concept in regards to her business. (Honors)

By emphasizing the relational aspect of teaching, Deborah furthers student learning. She strives to establish a personal connection with each individual in her classroom. Deborah's effort to give her students something on a daily basis ("I almost feel guilty if I don't have something to give the kids when they come to class," she confided while xeroxing worksheets.) symbolizes giving on a grander scale. She focuses on the human aspect with the intent of drawing her students into the classroom curriculum.

You have to go beyond the curriculum if you're going to really teach a student... There's a human being out there that you have to make contact with. And if you're going to make the curriculum meaningful, if you're going to make those kids really love your curriculum, so that when they're 85 years of age they're going to read history books for entertainment, or become involved in the political process, you've got to hook them in. It's up to the teacher to teach the human aspect. And that's the most important aspect because the kids won't really turn on to the curriculum until you make that personal connection.

The strong values Deborah holds about teaching -- the importance of organization, a need for flexibility, the theatrical aspects, a focus on affective dimensions as well as cognitive, the central importance of student learning, and a need for relational connection between teacher and student shape all five dimensions of her classroom curricular choice. Such "professional values" reflect broader "human values." "You can't separate professional from human values!" asserts Deborah. "The two are one." Thus her belief in the underlying importance of human and cultural values in societies guides her personal curricular emphasis in the classroom. A stress on human relations and respect and the value of a global view provide a framework within which Deborah's students examine the values of the different societies they study. Deborah's concern with

current social, economic, and political issues (e.g. the environment, overpopulation, poverty, social unrest, and nuclear war) ties historical issues to current issues through regular analogy. Her activist orientation pushes students to realize their active role in societal change. "I want them to examine the values they will work with throughout their lives and realize that they can make a change in society."

Deborah explains her personal values through her personal experiences. The human values she holds so dear are part of the stuff of her existence.

I am a reformed Jew by religious background. I come from a family that is very mixed with everything from a Zen Buddhist to... I was raised with a Christmas tree! So I was raised with a great deal of respect for different religious beliefs... Anyway, part of Jewish tradition is a social conscience... I remember my family was always involved with helping the poor, with civil liberties, with justice... I mean, this is how I was spoon fed. I was raised with a real concern... like in graduate school I was head counselor for the Upward Bound Project... helping kids out of the ghetto. I did all sorts of things... This is just part of my inheritance. I think it's also the philosophy in terms of the survival of the species. Increasingly, we're all interdependent, and one person's pain is your pain.

Deborah's experience as chairperson of the grievance committee in the district and personal experiences during her seventeen years of middle school teaching have convinced her "that you just allow no one to be mistreated. I mean the human relations is very strong... It is a cultural, it is a family, it is a personal value... It's a human value!"

Many of Deborah's values concerning teaching grow out of her experiences as a student.

My history teachers were mostly football coaches and baseball coaches. And they were about as exciting as a wet rag... read the chapter and answer the questions... discussion... We never had simulations. In my history classes, we never had any research

projects. We never had speakers. We never had field trips. We never did anything artistic related to history. We never wrote a letter to political authorities. We never went to observe political authorities and decision-making systems. The teachers were totally removed from the students.

Deborah's classroom curriculum reflects her response to these negative role models and her incorporation of the high expectations, organization, and passionate involvement with subject matter and students which characterized her mentors.

Mrs. Paulson was so zany... she was so exciting, she was so eccentric, she just made English alive! I still remember "Julius Caesar" where she went roaming around the room taking the different parts... reading various excerpts from various scenes of "Julius Caesar," and half the class was laughing at her. But I said my golly this lady's inspired... She let herself be vulnerable by becoming exciting and involving us, and even the kids who laughed at her respected her because they knew she wanted quality and she cared.

In Deborah's eyes, these qualities create a memorable learning situation for children. They are all "part of the personal touch which is vital."

CLIENT CONSIDERATIONS

Kids will direct curriculum if they get involved and the teacher listens.

Responsiveness to student needs and interests provides the second greatest source of influence on classroom curricular choices. Deborah teaches the same seventh grade social studies curriculum to her transition and honors students in different ways with different requirements. Some teacher responses, however, remain consistent across classes. Deborah believes firmly in structure, whether transition or honors. In both classes, she focuses on boosting student self-esteem, removing students from class only when they request it and providing opportunities for

transition and honors students to mix on field trips. Deborah considers student curricular requests thoughtfully. She added a topic on the Holocaust to the assignment sheet for a research project on the Hebrews upon student request and agreed to follow up on another student's suggestion for a homework assignment on social class distinctions at Talbot Middle School. Curricular pacing, in both classes, is geared to student needs.

Today I switched class... I decided to hold off on uses of wealth and sectors of production and to hold off on the film. I sensed a lack of relating in the discussion. The students had done their homework, they grasped the concepts, but they weren't plugged in.

Despite these across class consistencies, Deborah acknowledges that she approaches the two classes differently.

Transition classes represent an intermediary holding pattern for students moving from remedial skills classes up to college preparatory classes. Deborah describes a typical transitional student as "one who has problems" -- problems doing homework, behavior problems, problems with the law, ESL problems, or problems with the ability to conceptualize. Transitional kids don't or can't or won't do their homework. They require additional attention and an almost repetitive focus on key concepts.

In most transitions they have real trouble with the concepts. And I keep plugging... I get up there and dance around. I get very theatrical on purpose... to get, number one, their attention so they are looking at this teacher up there waving her arms... you're an actress!! You've got to really connect on the curriculum. And I want then to focus on land, labor, capital... land, labor, capital... if you jump up and down long enough and yell about it, act it out... they will be able to carry through.

Deborah abbreviates her treatment of topics in transition to avoid "cramming too much in." She may use the same materials and learning

activities with both classes, but more difficult assignments will be extra credit for transition students and required fare for honors. Transition students receive homework assignments on Mondays and Thursdays; honors students have homework every night. Deborah uses the same test frequently for both classes with minor modifications. She reads the test aloud to her transition students and supplements the honors' version with occasional essay questions. Evaluation revolves around student mastery of key concepts, a responsibility Deborah feels she has to the school board. Her primary goal for transition students, however, is to raise their self-esteem.

If you raise a child's self-esteem, he's willing to try. Often these kids are wounded kids in transition. If you can raise their self-esteem, then they'll be willing to try and take a risk to do their homework... to try and do extra credit... to answer questions in class. I want to graduate these kids up. I think we may have close to half who'll move up next year. I want to get those kids out and not have them identified as transition and stuck in here forever.

Talbot has three seventh grade honors blocks (social studies/English taught by the same teacher) designed for students who meet two of the following three criteria:

- 1) has been recommended by the sixth or seventh grade teacher because:
 - a) he/she reads three years or more above grade level
 - b) he/she displays spark, creativity, independent thinking and complexity in levels of understanding which distinguish him/her from classmates
 - c) he/she has well-developed skills; displays organization, efficiency, and speed when approaching tasks; is enthusiastic about doing assignments; and typically produces high-quality work
 - d) is estimated to be able to maintain at least a "B" average in an advanced class
- 2) has been identified as "gifted and talented"
- 3) has CTBS scores in the 97th percentile, nationally

(excerpt from department memo to
6th grade teachers regarding
student placement)

With this clientele, Deborah goes one step further with the daily social studies assignment. She may start out with the same page and same worksheet in her transition and honors classes, but the honors students grasp the concepts quickly and shoot along to enrichment.

The honors class receives a more detailed, indepth treatment of the material. They really go with it. They do in one day what the transitional students do in several.

Enrichment focuses on current social, political, and economic issues juxtaposed with historical parallels. Deborah reviews President Reagan's proposed budget as a contemporary example of "needs and wants" and assigns magazine articles dealing with problems facing our economy. She changes enrichment activities and materials on a regular basis to try new ideas or meet the needs and interests of a specific class.

Client considerations play a pivotal role in shaping Deborah's English curriculum for her honors class. The nebulous English framework provided by the district coupled with department policy emphasize the importance of student needs. According to the instructional supervisor in English...

In English the policies are you look at each class as an individual entity and then design the curriculum within the framework around that class. If you have children with skills needs in writing, you address this in the curriculum. You learn to shape the curriculum for the class...

Deborah responds by assessing her honors students' abilities, interests, and needs. She bases her curricular choices on this assessment.

Last year I did no grammar (in honors English). This year I'm doing grammar because I think it's important that kids have some background in it. This year I have lots of kids who can't spell so I'm doing

spelling. Last year the honors kids could spell so I didn't do much spelling. Last year 1/3 of the material in the school's literary magazine was from my honors class!

Deborah considers her students her "number one priority." They are her reason for being in the classroom. She stresses the need to be "sensitive to the class... the curriculum has to change daily. Some days you might do one type of assignment and the next year you may not even do it at all. Depending upon the students' needs..."

COLLEGIAL CIRCLES

My thinking pattern by which I come up with ideas is set off in reaction to others' ideas. What others give me is not always the "cat's pajamas," but I can revise it for my class.

Deborah's exchanges with her teaching colleagues constitute a third source of influence over her classroom curricular choices. In English where Deborah has little formal preparation and less district or department guidance, she collects ideas from colleagues and sews them into a patchwork quilt.

I had a bare, I still have a bare background in English... I've done a lot of learning... Anyway, my first year I never received one ditto, one curriculum memo about what I was supposed to be teaching. They said this is the grammar book, these are some of the literature books, good luck! Actually, they didn't even say good luck. I didn't receive a thing... not a thing... in terms of concepts, units... when I found out after I returned from maternity leave that I had to teach English with social studies, I went through the district and talked with Lucy, the gal I mentioned who is so creative. We had teamed over at Washington. She was very kind to share with me many ideas. I went to other teachers. I went to the labs they had over at Washington. I picked up copies of everything. I still go around like a vacuum cleaner... luckily we have Bay Area Writers, and I get more and more ideas.

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In social studies Deborah feels more confident, both about her personal expertise and the district and department's direction. Yet she continues to turn to teaching colleagues for ideas with the belief that, "The more ideas you get, the richer you become."

As the social studies and English departments share a common office and the seventh grade teachers teach blocked classes, a structure conducive to collegial exchange exists. Within this structure, both formal and informal exchange occurs. Deborah and her colleagues describe one of the roles of the instructional supervisor (I.S.) as that of facilitating collegial exchange of curricular ideas. The supervisor's success in this role varies from department to department. In social studies, the I.S. distributes xeroxed sheets of new ideas to her teachers' mailboxes and spends the monthly department meetings almost entirely on the curriculum. Deborah and her colleagues question the I.S.'s effectiveness.

Basically, department meetings concern the I.S.'s ideas about what we should be doing or new district or state requirements. The I.S. tells us, we go out, and nothing changes. We might as well not have gone.
(7th grade social studies/English teacher)

The English I.S. puts forth less effort with even fewer results.

Other avenues of formal exchange include the department sharing basket established by an eighth grade social studies teacher about ten years ago. Although it "used to be used," it's now been relegated to the top of a file cabinet and replaced by more informal means of collegial exchange. Department files contain a variety of curricular resources — worksheets, tests, simulations, etc. which are poorly kept up and drawn upon infrequently by teachers. A list of films on order from the county

resides on the department bulletin board to promote collegial sharing.

Deborah signs it conscientiously. Not everyone else remembers.

Informal avenues of exchange appear most effective. Requests and offerings among friends in the department occur on a regular basis.

You might tell somebody when something goes well... you get so excited!! He or she may then try a variation of his or her own. Generally, sharing is volunteered or asked for...

(8th grade social studies teacher)

Deborah includes colleagues in her curricular plans and special projects.

She makes a point of observing them at work in their classrooms to both

"build (her) colleagues up" and gather new ideas.

I'm the only one who observes colleagues. I really enjoy it. And I pick up so many good ideas! I began it two years ago. I think it's a great way to learn. There's nothing, no matter how old I am... I can always learn new tricks.

Deborah picks up new tricks within her own classroom from Mrs. Adams, a former special education teacher who works as a teacher's aide with the transition class. Deborah considers Mrs. Adams her "co-teacher" and addresses her as such in the classroom, reinforcing her credibility with students. Deborah welcomes her aide's input. She encourages Mrs. Adams' suggestions for revision and active participation in the classroom curriculum. Mrs. Adams provides Deborah with another source of valuable ideas.

I get ideas at the craziest times... somebody will say something and click... something will go off like Mrs. Adams mentioned Olympic Games... having a contest... and I am so impressed with Elaine, the new French teacher in the district... She had done a football game in French. I don't know what Mrs. Adams said about Olympic Games or a contest to finish up the year... Anyway, that's how my brain functions. And I thought, WOW! Let's have a marathon race with one mile, two mile, and three mile questions. The kids

will all come in costume and choose teams. It will be really fun!

Although Deborah seeks out new ideas and collegial exchange, not all of her peers share her enthusiasm. Teachers in the social studies and English departments display "an interesting territoriality about particular units... units that they wrote or that they particularly like." Some teachers refuse flatly to teach the seventh grade curriculum, preferring to barricade themselves behind grade eight. Jealousy among colleagues regarding class assignments can result in "the kiss of death." Deborah devotes her energies to fighting this divisiveness.

It's important in terms of curriculum to be a team player... In my life professionally I'm turning from nurturing my students to wanting to nurture my colleagues... It's very important to bring out the best in your colleagues. I'm trying to set seeds in terms of human relations to establish a supportive, sharing system... where people will support one another, bring out the best in one another, share curriculum, not have one-up-manship... In terms of curriculum, you need to have everyone pulling together.

By observing her colleagues at work and pointing out "all the good things they do... never anything negative," by sharing her own ideas freely and picking up on the ideas of others, Deborah fosters collegial exchange and enriches her classroom curriculum.

I like the Japanese way of getting an idea and modifying it. You learn to be creative by being exposed to many ideas. It's like tossing a pebble into water and watching the concentric rings that branch out.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL: PROFESSIONAL PREREQUISITES

I say I'm an excellent social studies and a very good English teacher, not excellent. I have really been working hard... busting my tush learning how to teach English in the last three years...

Deborah's knowledge and skill as a classroom teacher vie with collegial exchange as the third most powerful influence over her classroom curricular choices. Professional training provides one source of knowledge and skill along with seventeen years of middle school teaching. Collegial exchange, professional journals, and conferences and seminars supplement Deborah's education and experience to establish a rich base upon which Deborah draws in curricular decision-making.

Pedagogical knowledge guides Deborah's choice of teaching techniques. The wide range of techniques she uses to present curricular concepts and involve students with them -- group work, whole class discussion, lecture, simulation, independent projects, etc. reflects her acquaintance and skill with various forms of pedagogy. Monotonous routine does not exist in Deborah's classroom. Each day she and her students approach key curricular concepts from different vantage points.

Deborah draws upon her pedagogical knowledge to insure student concentration on key concepts. Through the development of advance organizers (daily worksheets) and animated teacher presentation, she focuses student attention and guides their understanding. Staged assignments scaffold student learning with longer sequences reserved for honors students.

We are building steps. With the transition class we can't sequence for long periods... you can't have big jumps. The conceptualization with the honors class is immense.

Curricular pacing and anticipation of student reactions ("The same activity will produce different reactions in the two classes.") reflect the refinement of pedagogical knowledge and skill. Evaluation of student learning draws further on pedagogical knowledge as Deborah designs,

revises, and reuses assignments and tests appropriate to subject matter and students. With the variety of teaching techniques she uses in class, Deborah can not always predict learning outcomes. "I don't know what I'm hatching out there sometimes!! So I have a variety of evaluation techniques."

Theoretical knowledge provides another source of influence on classroom curricular choices. Deborah's notions of motivation theory prompt her to use the same curricular materials in both transition and honors and involve students in some of the same learning activities.

Anywhere my honors kids are invited, my transition are also invited. Some of the kids in transition are gifted. They just haven't been tapped... I give out extra credit options to the kids who are in my transition to stretch and do projects of interest to them. They go on the same field trips on purpose... Last year they thought they were an honors class... I thought it was just great.

She motivates students to tackle unfamiliar terrain by reducing threat.

Lots of assignments involve the right brain... I grade such assignments on effort. It's a win/win situation. The kids are super scholars. They've conditioned their left brain but not their right. Because they know it's a win/win situation (They get an "A" for effort.), they have the guts to try it.

Theoretical notions of the right/left brain dichotomy and test theory shape Deborah's selection of materials, learning activities, and modes of evaluation in her classroom.

In deciding what to teach, Deborah turns to her disciplinary knowledge for guidance. With two degrees in history and a career of social studies teaching, Deborah claims she teaches social studies "almost viscerally."

I'm still working out what I call an A+ curriculum in English — an outstanding curriculum like the social studies curriculum.

"Paddling" to keep afloat occurs in English. Lacking disciplinary preparation and clear direction from either department or district, Deborah relies upon personal values and experience ("I had my research papers in honors English."), student needs and interests, and collegial exchange to construct an English curriculum. She pounces upon new ideas and fresh approaches and introduces them into her classroom.

Tomorrow I'm trying a writing log in English... I've read about it, but I've never tried it before. The students will have to read to page 50 in The Walls of Windy Troy, and I am going to ask them to write their reactions to anything in the book or if they haven't read why not.

Deborah's insecurity with English and her passionate involvement in history produce a blurring of boundaries between the two disciplines in Deborah's classroom. English becomes an extension of social studies where students research social studies topics and write social studies reports. Their reading revolves around historical biographies, historical fiction, and classics such as The Odyssey -- companion pieces to units in social studies. Thus Deborah's disciplinary knowledge or lack of knowledge can be seen as instrumental in curricular choice.

CONCLUSION: PROFESSIONAL FACTORS IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

A consistent pattern of influence over classroom curricular choices emerges from this analysis. Professional factors, specifically personal values and experience, carry the most weight in Deborah's selection of curricular concepts, modes of presentation, texts/materials, learning activities, and forms of evaluation in both social studies and English. Client factors, as in student characteristics, provide the second greatest

source of influence over teacher choice along all five dimensions. The third greatest source of influence appears to be a combination of professional knowledge/skills and collegial exchange, both professional factors. This pattern of influence remains consistent across all five classroom curricular dimensions across both subjects.

Despite consistency across subject matter, important distinctions exist between the classroom curriculum in social studies and the classroom curriculum in English. The seventh grade social studies curriculum comes fully packaged along all five curricular dimensions from the district. It is an organizational given. The classroom teacher's choices of what to teach, how to teach it, and how to evaluate student learning revolve around the specified curriculum. Her choices are guided by professional factors and client concerns, but they are generally made within the framework of the district guidelines or spun off from those guidelines. In English, however, no such guidelines exist. The single sheet of broad topics which constitutes the district English framework in no way constrains teacher choice. Faced with "a wide open landscape" and "no direction," Deborah has gone about accumulating ideas and materials from colleagues and constructing curriculum using the identical criteria for her curricular choices: personal values and experiences, student characteristics, and professional knowledge/skills and collegial exchange. Despite her familiarity with social studies and her lack of familiarity with English, the same pattern of influence guides her curricular decision-making in both subjects. The consistency of her choices is striking!

An explanation of the pervasive influence of professional factors over Deborah Rosen's classroom curriculum rests in those factors which

appear to have little direct influence over her curricular choices. Norms, both professional and organizational, establish a school and district environment supportive of professional and personal autonomy. Little, if any, communication exists between different grades and different schools. "I don't even know what the high school and elementary school teach!" Deborah admits. Communication with the district is non-existent. "The district office is like on another planet... Administrators don't show up. You have to go down there... I think there are some teachers who never visit the district office all year. It's easy to do." Professional norms of collegiality stress the voluntary aspect of sharing, sharing which is often accompanied by professional distrust. "When you translate the meta-messages (of collegial exchange)," says Deborah, "you hear 'You're not going to take this away? This is my unit!'" According to Deborah Rosen, "Everyone is always out to get what they can... The message from the moment I entered the district was to get what you can... the room you want, the books you want, and the classes you want." Having staked their claim, individual teachers retreat to their classrooms where, in the words of one of Deborah's colleagues, "They are in their own domain and are king." She adds, "No one will tell us what to do." Personal and professional autonomy reign.

Parents provide Deborah with a strong source of professional and personal affirmation and support. She encourages parent contact. "I really like to know my parents." Deborah has spent up to two hours a night on the phone with parents and sends home complimentary notes.

I think it's really important to do that. In fact, I am really a believer. I want the parents involved. Now that I'm a mother I encourage them to call me by my first name. I try and break down all the barriers between communication. I think that teaching must be like a bonding situation. The teacher is like an

aunt. I have a professional, ethical responsibility to help raise that child.

Deborah "adopts" students with special behavioral and academic problems and establishes a close relationship with the students' parents through weekly written reports, frequent phone calls, and visits to the home. She spells out parental responsibility in this relationship:

- 1) All parents will spend 15 minutes five times a week in helping your child, or being in the same room as your child, while he/she accomplishes the assigned homework/tasks which will lead to the rewards and joys of knowledge and the learning of responsibility.
- 2) All parents will make certain that this sheet (listing progress on behavioral and academic goals) arrives home to them on Friday of each week.
- 3) All parents will be certain that rewards are given for the points earned by their son/daughter.

Parents respond to Deborah's obvious caring and extra efforts on behalf of their children with gratitude. "I get a lot of praise, a lot of feedback from parents." One couple sent Deborah a dozen roses; another sent her a hibiscus plant from Hawaii. Every holiday students and their families shower her with gifts and cards. Deborah acknowledges this parental support with pride and saves the notes she receives in a drawer at home.

6 December 1984

Dear Mrs. Rosen,

A much overdue note to tell you how much I appreciated your efforts with Stephen last year. You really engaged him, and more important, showed him that he had ability and value. This critical lesson has carried over clearly to his work this year...

The professional respect Deborah receives from the parents of her students she receives from her superiors as well. "The strongest aspect of the social studies department is the teachers," affirms the I.S.

"They're qualified, they're students, they're personally attractive, they use a variety of strategies and teaching techniques. They're not satisfied to do it just one way." The English I.S. echoes his colleague's opinion.

The strength of the English department is its diversity. Very fortunately, my teachers are not closed. I think one of the joys and one of the important things of the department is for teachers to be creative. The teaching profession is for me a creative profession. My teachers have strengths and weaknesses. They come to the department with a variety of experiences. They do things differently... I'm extremely pleased.

Supervisor respect for teacher individuality translates into little supervision and minimal direction. Talbot Middle School's principal reinforces this orientation.

I do my best to portray the sense that what happens in the classroom is the most vital aspect of the school. We arrange our supervision... we minimize all of that as much as possible with the assumption that what happens those five periods is 99% of what school is about... The basic assumption is that teachers have knowledgeability and skill.

At the district office, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction describes his role as that of providing "guides and instructional assistance" to teachers. "I can put that instructional material in front of teachers, and they can run with it." Little curriculum development and no formal curriculum evaluation occur at the district level. That does not mean that curriculum evaluation, revision, and development do not occur. "I think it (the curriculum) is being evaluated by the people who are most intimately involved, and those are the people teaching it. And if it isn't working, they tell us and we change it." The district office vests classroom teachers with the ultimate responsibility for curricular choice. Prescribed curricular

policy, whether the tightly structured social studies program or the skeletal English framework, provides a framework for personal interpretation at the classroom level.

This constellation of factors -- professional and organizational norms, parent contact, subordinate/superior relationships and state/district/school policy, form a supportive environment within which professional factors, especially personal values and experience, thrive. Within an organizational context which supports professional autonomy, Deborah's curricular choices reflect her personal orientation to professionalism. In those instances when professional autonomy and organizational environment conflict, Deborah Rosen subverts organizational directives to meet what she considers a higher obligation to professional and personal values.

I think teachers must be treated as professionals, and as I have again and again pointed out to you they will do what they want to anyway. They will emphasize what they think is important. What I've learned through the years is basically don't make an issue that you're doing something different. Be very diplomatic... It's very important even though you have extremely strong beliefs.

Deborah brought her Russian unit "in the back door." After attending a special curriculum seminar on Russia, Deborah and a colleague developed a "wonderful curriculum on the Russian children and culture... which is politically dynamite." In deference to organizational norms and superiors, they gained permission to "spend two days on the Russian children" and proceeded to teach the unit for two to three weeks.

If people see that they disagree with the I.S., they just go around and do their own thing... And this is what I have done for seventeen years because I've had very few competent administrators to work with so I work in spite of them. You become very proficient politically to go around them so they don't lose face because they're human beings with feelings. If you're

faced with someone who is incompetent to various degrees and missing the boat in terms of curriculum, you have to smile sweetly and go around to do what you want to do.

After her assignment to two English classes and one social studies class this past fall, Deborah arranged to swap with an English colleague saddled with two social studies classes. The two teachers "figured it all out," bypassed the administrator responsible for the original scheduling, and finalized the schedule switch with an upper level administrator. Professional concerns overcome organizational obligations in such situations. In Deborah's words, "I may be totally wrong, but I have to act on my conscience."

Deborah's diplomacy in "going around" organizational obligations points to the limits placed upon her by a supportive environment. Professional and personal values shape Deborah's classroom curriculum and are allowed to do so and actually supported by the organizational environment of the school and district within which she works. For Deborah to flaunt her organizational obligations could result in the organization withdrawing its support. Without such support, Deborah's ability to shape her classroom curriculum according to professional and personal values would be jeopardized.

From this case study, the following hypotheses emerge. Professional factors, predominantly personal values and experience, drive professional autonomy over the classroom curriculum. Acting as an autonomous agent, the teacher responds to client obligations. The classroom teacher's interaction with the organizational environment limits or expands the bounds of curricular autonomy in her classroom.

IMPLICATIONS

The pervasive influence of personal and professional conscience on Deborah Rosen's classroom curriculum and the integral support she receives from her organizational environment raise a number of issues for further investigation.

- 1) Without organizational support, would the classroom curriculum so clearly reflect the teacher's personal and professional values?
- 2) What is the nature of personal and professional values? What are their origins? How are they manifested in the classroom curriculum?
- 3) What is the nature of the organizational environment? What are its origins? How is it manifested in the classroom curriculum?
- 4) If the classroom teacher does not hold such strong personal and professional beliefs, what are the greatest sources of influence on her classroom curriculum?
- 5) How would the classroom curriculum respond to frequent and explicit organizational directives?

Such questions highlight the need for further research into relationships among the multiple factors influencing teacher curricular choice. We must deepen our understanding of professional factors, specifically personal values and experience, and the full range of organizational factors which place boundaries around professional autonomy.

The delicate balance between autonomy and obligation at both classroom and policy levels surfaces in this case study of one classroom teacher. The interaction of professional autonomy and organizational obligation shapes Deborah Rosen's curricular decision-making process and determines her classroom curriculum. Our exploration of this interaction,

although based on a sample of one, suggests a number of implications for policy and practice. In terms of practice, the classroom curriculum provides both a source of collegial exchange and benefits from such exchange. The construction, evaluation, and revision of classroom curriculum represents a creative enterprise for individual teachers, an enterprise which involves continual learning and professional renewal but also consumes considerable amounts of time. The role of personal values and experience in this endeavor must not be underestimated. Professional support in the form of seminars, conferences, and consultants (as in the Bay Area Writers' Project) broadens the classroom teacher's curricular knowledge base. Careful evaluation of student characteristics constitutes a crucial element of classroom curriculum construction, an undertaking requiring professional expertise. These issues define classroom curriculum as a professional concern.

These issues point simultaneously to potential policy implications for the organization. If classroom curriculum is to benefit from the rich potential of collegial exchange, avenues for such exchange must be structured into the organization through district and school policy, subordinate/superior relationships, and organizational norms. Deborah herself has provided a starting point by independently observing her teaching colleagues. In order to exploit the potential of curriculum development, evaluation, and revision as sources of professional development and renewal, the organizational structure must provide opportunities for teachers to engage in such activities on a regular basis. The diversity of personal values and life experiences guiding classroom curricular practice must be recognized by the organization and worked with instead of against to more fully capitalize on the richness of

curriculum potential. Finally, organizational consideration of the number of students per class and their range of abilities will address the number one priority of teachers -- the students they teach. In Deborah's words, "The curriculum is the key to making that human being grow. You have a human being... that's the key."

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